

# HALLMARKS

A black and white photograph of a young woman sitting on a grassy field. She is wearing a dark-colored halter-neck top and a light-colored, shiny, draped skirt. She is sitting with her back to the camera, hugging her knees with her arms. Her head is bowed down, and her hair is pulled back. The background is a field of tall grass.

FALL

1995



## A RELUCTANT EXPERIMENT IN FREE VERSE

perhaps

i do not write great stuff but

it's pretty and

it rhymes and

i like it and

it makes my heart dance and

perhaps it makes yours dance too

or

perhaps

your heart just taps its foot in time

and i never mix metaphors.

perhaps

i am trite but

at least i don't know it, being ignorant

so maybe to me cliches, being new, sparkle.

perhaps

you never had the privileged education i did

your second grade teacher never told you

that Phonics is Fun

and so

when my mind echoes and rejoices in its own twisted pattern games

you think i am silly and

perhaps i am.

perhaps

i should delve deep and

find my inner child and

take her to swing at the playground

so we can think deep thoughts

and figure out where these \*!?!#

arbitrary line breaks really go

but

suppose

instead i (we, that is, me and my inner child)

want to show you the pulse of the swings,

the pulse of our heart and mind

after an intense game of tag

then if you still want deep thoughts

think deeply yourself

look under the regular pulse of the swings

and the heart, and the fiercely rhythmic mind

look for deep thoughts there

if you look *real* hard

there might be something there—

perhaps...

SARAH CHISOLM (12)

## PENELOPE

I've watched you, sadly, fading far away;  
A sickened shadow of your former soul  
Stares out from yet-clear eyes and yet-strong brow.  
You rule this isle with patient hand, and yet  
You do not have the patience to transform  
A land of common laborers and thieves  
Into a land of heroes like yourself.  
You judge by lesser evils, not by right,  
And compromise your highly-conceived laws  
And creep back in beside me on the hearth.  
Your mariners are restless, growing soft  
And fat, and murmuring against—not you,  
But me, the wife, who “chains him to the hearth.”

Not so! As much as I love you, or else  
Because I hold your spirit in my soul,  
I cannot bear to hold it meekly down  
In torpid, plodding duty to myself  
And to a haven homeland grown too close.

Go, go! fair lord, to frolic on pale shores  
Where gentle sirens sing you soft asleep.  
Go drink up new adventures like new wine  
Till your old mind is like to burst its seams  
With boiling and fermenting new ideas.  
Let oceanic stars pierce deep your eyes  
And stud your darkened memory with tales  
Of new adventures, new heroic deeds  
To tell in foreign courts and then at home.  
Yet tell not me your fabled wanderings  
But take me with you, bold Odysseus!

For twenty years, I wove, and wept, and watched,  
And saw your weary woes in my dark shroud,  
A tapestry of all I knew of you,  
A blurred depiction of mysterious things,  
Of islands, monsters, gods I could not see.  
I wept for you, in danger, and for me,  
Imperiled, worse, imprisoned, impotent.  
And when you came, I drank old, mellow wine,  
Heard well-shaped tales that fell sweet on my ears.

But I want sharp, new, bitter vintage now  
And piercing constellations, shining threads  
Of painting brightness for my tapestry.  
I'll tear the gloomy shroud from my dark loom;  
I'll weave the brightly glowing spectrum's hues  
And weave in stars, and wind, and wine, and fire.

Ulysses, take me with you when you go!

SARAH CHISOLM (12)



## I WEAR LIPSTICK AT NIGHT

I wear lipstick at night, sometimes, then go I to bed. Tonight I apply Maybelline, some new kind that makes my lips feel slick and new, like they don't match the slightly goofy face in the mirror. I relish the feeling and absentmindedly smack and poof my lips for five minutes, happy and secretive. In general, I don't wear makeup; even at necessary occasions it is always sparse and well concealed: Almay's "Brown No. 2" eyeliner and Natural Glow's "Nude" lipstick at the most. I pick up a tattered copy of *The Great Gatsby*, but before I can immerse myself in total decadence, I hear a low growrrrr from far beneath my lumpy gray comforter.

I glance at the large grey mirror in the yellow-bright hallway as I skiddle towards the fridge in my brown bathrobe. I stop, laugh, and look again; I have already forgotten how daring and colorful, what a difference such miniscule layer of pigment makes. My lips amaze me, mystify me, so bright during these dark boring hours, so audacious. I smirk and feel quite evil and self-satisfied.

Oh but this is so worth the slightly guilty face I saw in the mirror not 30 minutes ago!

I turn towards the kitchen again, then return to my warm room, replete with all the loot from my quite successful raid. I think my kitchen fridge has a mind of its own: but six hours ago I stood in front of that repository, dumfounded in my search for sustenance. How could anything that much bigger than me and full of food not have anything I was willing to eat? Now, though, the crocks of my arms cherish a bag of flaked coconut, a tin of sardines, a small green lime, an almost empty bottle of Worrell's Grade AA Maple Syrup, and my right hand steadies a coolly inviting glass of Ovaltine. I was tempted by the Jell-o, but decided I did not want to bother to cook.

Well, my definition of cooking includes anything that involves heating water or anything that takes more than 15 minutes to prepare, so Jell-o is clearly cooking.

I delicately slice the lime, enjoying the game I create of keeping the slices thinner than paper. My skills at this game hardly flourish, but I am nonetheless amused. I pour a bit of syrup on the slices, and garnish with coconut. I examine this veritable prototype of diversity which I have created: sickeningly sweet syrup, bitter, yet sour, lime, tasteless two-month-old coconut flakes, dry and puffy white, wet and slimy green, and grainy slow brown. All this contrast makes me happy as I grin wickedly again. The grin reminds me of my shocking lips, and I laugh aloud.



No-one that knows me would suspect that I, Jane Brownstone, would be up after one-o'clock with bright coppery lipstick on, eating a lime. And a well-dressed lime at that!

I slide into bed, feeling sneaky and content. Here I lie, between faded yellow sheets and mismatching grey cover, my blissfully lipsticked head beaming from a green pillowcase. The sheets are old, old, old. I don't know how old, but they are older than I and I am already a wise invincible 17. The pillow-case is from sheets my mother bought me seven years ago when I redecorated my room. Two years later, I stumbled upon my old yellow sheets and reclaimed them; however, the laundry machine or some linen closet monster had since captured the yellow pillowcase. The grey blanket is from my sister's other twin bed; she redecorated that same year, but now that she is in college she only needs one blanket. How on earth did this blanket end up in my room anyways?

Excitedly, I grasp the slightly dented tin of sardines. I savour the moment before I, for the first time in my existence, open a tin of sardines. The tin is yellow with green stripes and has a little key on it, like on all those old cartoons. The top puffs out a bit; it seems to me that it is as swelled as I. I feel elated and somehow connected to times gone by. Few of my friends, indeed, have opened a tin of sardines, I'd bet, and I'd say none are awake at this very moment staring at a small tin, proud and hopeful, ready to open sardines for the first time. In fact, I'd bet that in the US, a country of 250 million, less than two and a half million are right now opening sardines, and only 500 for the first time. Happily a part of such an elite group, I decisively clink the long metal wire into the keyhole and firmly, proudly roll the top back.

Oh. My. God.

I have never smelled anything quite like this. The solid pieces of fish have funkified and are indistinguishable from the brine the dead animal rests in. Geez, not only am I connected to some history, I'm holding an actual antique. I check for a date on the tin, but it has long worn off. . . How long has it been since Mom cleaned out the fridge?

I gingerly place the tin on the floor near my bed, but can still smell rotten brine and salty deadness, so I get out of my warm bed and scoot it far away from my sleepy nostrils. I forget to pick up my book on the return trip to my pillow, but decide that after all, it's time to go to sleep.

Perhaps tomorrow I'll wear Revlon's "Rearing to Go Red."

SARAH COSTONIS (12)



## HELP! I'M ADDICTED TO CHAPSTICK:

BASED ON AN EXAGGERATED TRUE STORY BY JESSICA TUCKER

It all started on a nice cool night in April of '93. I had just brushed my teeth and wiped my lips with the towel, as I had every night of my life, when all of the sudden, I felt the urge to put on some of the soothing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle chapstick I had asked for Santa to bring me. Little did I know, this one instance would change my teenage life forever.

Pretty soon I was doing it every night and morning, after I wiped the slobbery toothpaste from my mouth. Then I started putting some on after I had scraped my mouth so many times with a napkin at lunch. My freshman year, before I came to Harpeth Hall, I actually had pockets to use, so the chapstick became part of my own private uniform. I became known as the chapstick girl by my friends; I didn't care about the teasing; I found comfort in my chapstick. I used it whenever I felt like it, sometimes four to five times a day. It was not until a friend told me a logical fact that I became wary of my sickening obsession—"If you put on chapstick too much, your lips stop naturally rewetting themselves." I just wanted to hit that jerk. Who was she to tell me I had a problem? But then I got to thinking, I don't really need to apply it all the time, maybe I can cut down, or not use it at all. (Hmmm, this made sense. Why didn't I think of that sooner? But I would never let her know this.)

It was then that I tried to start cutting down on my petroleum usage. I stopped carrying it around in my bag to control the urge. My lips just didn't feel the same, so I thought about it constantly, especially during European History. I couldn't focus my energy on tests because when I touched my pen to my lips while concentrating, it reminded me of my poor chapstick-deprived self.

Then came denial—hey, who can tell me whether or not to use Chapstick? That's right, no one. I don't have a problem. I then increased my applications to twice as much as I had used at the peak of my disease. Then, one day, I ran out of chapstick. I tried lip gloss, but it didn't give me the tingly feeling my mint Chapstick once gave. It was then that I realized I had a serious problem, but what to do? Are there any other people who share my addiction? Am I just a freak? Well, I know what my friends would say to that, but what about the rest of the world? Surely there's someone else desperate in the use of Chapstick,



because I see it in all the cheap stores I go into.

Rather than seeking a support group, while making myself look foolish in the process, or finding megabuck psychiatric help, I decided to write this as part of my mental healing, hoping that other chapstick addicts might find comfort in my story. If you, too, have this problem, feel free to talk to me in the hall (if you know who I am). I'll be there for you, man. I know how rough it is when you're a big dork and the only thing that keeps you going is knowing you have smooth lips. I feel your pain.

Jessica Tucker, the world's first and only Chapstick addict, is successfully recovering in a classroom near you. She now has cut down to using it once a day, and would appreciate it if no other girl flaunts their chapstick in her face.

*JESSICA TUCKER (11)*

## RUN FREER THAN THE WIND

Run freer than the wind my wild child  
Borne of lust too young to be considered  
As right or wrong or real

Cling to the mounting waves of insurrection  
amidst rotted planks, weathered ships  
Whose sturdy brows overlook ledges  
Beyond your limited pearls of wisdom

Head thrown back, taste the storm  
Breathe the torrid airs unleashed from  
Humbled environs of opal light  
Running, Fleeing, Escaping to drop amid  
The wrinkled leaves of fall

Join those who loved you  
as a spiraling breeze  
Sent to them  
as a summer whirlwind  
Twisting into the finite sunset

*DEVON WILLIAMSON (10)*



## CANCER

You always take advantage of the gleam in the two ovals of blue,  
The rosy lips parted in a smile, One that she said  
she used to practice in the mirror so the dimples appeared.  
But when you are at the age to create dimples yourself,  
Teeth pleading for silver metal repair,  
You never fathom the thought that she is not eternal.  
You think that if you go to school in all its newness and pretty plaid  
And you smile and laugh with your dozens of best friends,  
And absorb yourself with you  
That everyone will see you as the wonder who was your mother.  
Your ignorance leads you to realize three years too late  
That her mattress is the only environment she knows  
And her voice betrays her and hides all her words with silence.  
Your discovery causes you to stop smiling and  
your friends have come to similar revelations of the cruelty of life,  
So together with them, you bathe in the pain of freshman status.  
One day you awaken to find this is the last year of the life you created,  
Somewhere in the midst of the time you had accepted life,  
grown into peace and embraced the world you had once shut out.  
You then can see that you had spent seven years  
Avoiding her room, fearing her blank stare.  
But if you had not hid, her blankness would be knowledge.  
You enter the room and face each other as strangers.  
You see the skin hanging limply over bones and want to turn away.  
But her eyes light up, her lips part revealing dimples  
The old familiar standing huge on an emaciated face  
And you realize that you want to be like her more than ever.

*LIZ LIGON (12)*

## THAT WHICH WHISPERED FEATHERS

That which whispered feathers upon the mountains,  
which carried across the darkness that haunting song of untold pain,  
which brought the rocky shoreline to its knees against the waves,  
which spread the glowing embers through the forest in the night,  
Now, softly tells me secrets as it pushes through the leaves,  
brings to me remnants of the sunshine and the storm,  
strongly guides my tiny boat to the safety of the harbor.  
Gently tousling my hair these kisses whisk away the heat.  
Now, that which stops for no one is tame to pleasing me.

*ALLISON BROWN (11)*



## CRICKETS AND FIREFLIES

"Have you ever met anybody that you, well, kinda fit just right with? That's how it is with Tommy and me. When he'd hold me, there wadn't nothin' wrong in the world. You'd think we wouldn't fit so good 'cause he's so tall, but we just kinda . . . work. Everything works with us. Nothin' seems wrong. Now, I ain't no dumbass, I know there are always wrong things goin' on, but we just haven't found any yet. I dunno if that's real good or real bad or somewhere in between, but I ain't no dumbass about me and guys."

"I know that, Bobbie. At least I've never seen you be shortsighted. Well, except for - -"

"Yeah: John Whatshisname, I know." Bobbie rolled her eyes at her younger friend. "But I learned my lesson real good, ya gotta admit. But you don't understand this fit thing at all, I can see you don't. I, well," Bobbie searched for a comparison, tilting her head, looking to the side as if the tobacco plants were concealing her analogy. "You've just never experienced it. I never had before Tom either. It's not like we become this big oneness, like you know with some guys you become extensions of each other and not independent thinkin' people any longer. This didn't like that. We both remain ourselves, but . . ." She twisted a short blonde curl across her finger. Kate secretly smiled when yet again Bobbie's movements so completely betrayed the tone of her thoughts; she never needed to speak verbally, yet she was such an expert at talking. "It's like we... the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. Us together is better."

"I think I know what you mean."

"No, you don't. No offense." Bobbie tossed her cigarette out to the ground. She and Kate watched as the burning red rainbow exploded into an orange pot of gold at the end of its graceful arc. They stared pensively as it sat on the bare earth in front of Bobbie's porch before Bobbie impulsively pushed the curl behind her ear and continued. "I know what you're thinkin' of. I think. But this really is different. We fit into each other right, and we feel ourselves, I don't know, becomin' lighter, better, losin' all the bad things in our souls. We're almost medicine for each other."

Pale Kate laughed, a dry sound next to Bobbie's rich Southern voice. "You should market yourselves: Menage A Trois with Bobbie and Thomas: The Only Known Cure to the Common Cold." The cigarette smoked and went out, abandoning the two friends to relish the twilight. Humid warm air and the distinctly Southern mixture of crickets, frogs, and cicadas surrounded them. Kate still loved the crickets' cacophonous hymn, finding beauty in a sound which Bobbie could only disregard, much like Cicero's mortals who are deaf to the music of the spheres.

Kate stretched a slender arm out into the semi-darkness, recovered it, then peered into her cupped palms. A yellow green glow spilled out through the cracks in her fingers and illuminated her pretty features. Kate's mind lit up with remembrances, and words tumbled unwittingly out of her mouth.



"Bobbie, you would not believe the huge fireflies in the North. I'd just look outside into my mom's yard and they'd all be swimming around like stars on the ground. It was like all of Upperstate New York was a giant glittering green rhinestone mine." Bobbie nodded, her mind clearly elsewhere, so Kate flickered off again. Kate thought of herself as not one to waste effort.

Crickets hummed; a few solitary cars motored by in the distance; yellow green masculine light appeared in the yard, answered by smaller greener ones three feet below. A light breeze drew across Bobbie's yard, carrying the redolence of distant fields and lakes and forests. Perhaps, thought Kate, she was imagining these smells. Bobbie had told her that there were no natural lakes in Tennessee, and the land here was all under cultivation. But this air was like a breath, or a call. It was almost an entity instead of casually scattered molecules. The humidity, much berated by Bobbie, gave the air substance, like it was a very flexible solid. Solid all around you, but a creature smart enough to move with you so that you only feel its edges, so that you never penetrate into its being. To test this, Kate made several sudden movements, attempting to puncture the creature's skin. Finding herself unable, she relaxed into the air, slumping against it and feeling the rhythms of life all around her.

"Crazy girl, what have you been doin'?" Bobbie, distracted from her reverie, looked at Kate with a half smile.

"Oh, just testing to see if you were paying attention," Kate replied offhandedly, untruthfully. "What were you thinking about?"

"Tom. Idn't that disgustin'?"

"God, you are obsessed."

"No, not obsessed, but he's a pleasant thought. I don't get obsessed. Lately, you know, I been thinkin'."

"How very subversive."

Bobbie smiled obligingly at Kate and tapped her index finger to her lips for a few moments before continuing. "I figure: we don't really need anything. Not no body, not no cigarette, nor really anything."

Kate's mouth quirked. "Thanks for reminding me; I knew I'd forgotten what I wanted." She promptly drew out a Pall Mall cigarette and lit the tip. Tilting her chin back, she blew three perfectly round smoke rings. They were thick. Illuminated by both moon and faded sunset, Kate thought that they almost looked real. Nonsense, she replied. They are real. Why would they seem to be more real with this lighting when there's not really a time when they're less real? Can one thing be less real than another? Is smoke more real than a strong emotion, one you can sense through gestures, sweat, pulse, pheromones?

After the lighter's red after-image faded from Bobbie's wincing eyes, she playfully hit Kate's elbow, knocking a tiny bit of ash to the peeling white floor, and said, "I don't guess you're in the mood for philosophical debate, or intellectually stimulated inquiry/response, or whatever Professor Talbert called it."

Kate pinched her nose and declared, "There's not such a *thing* as an educated guess, Miss Scott. Why, it's an oxymoron. I cannot *tolerate* such articles in my seminars." Bobbie laughed aloud. "I guess not, Bobbie." The Kate wondered whether a lie was less real than an emo-



tion. Both, she decided, were made up by human, were constructs of the imagination. Wait, was an emotion a construct of the imagination? Kate suddenly stepped to Bobbie and gave her older friend a quick hug to release the feeling of heat on the back of her neck which the construct of guilt had created.

Bobbie of course thought the hug was an "I'm sorry I'm not in the same talkative mood you're in" hug instead of an "I'm sorry I lie to you all the time, but I can't help it because it's really fun to do" hug. "You're so affectionate, Kate!"

Kate smiled demurely; then startled, she asked, "I hug you like that often?"

"Yeah, silly." Bobbie reached over to touch Kate's hair. "For someone so averse to philosophical debate, you're sure thinkin a lot. I can always tell cause your eyes get real defocused."

Again, Kate smiled. She liked to laugh at herself. She blew another thick ring, flicked her Pall Mall to the ground, and shifted her weight forward, squeaking the porch chair. She paused to fold her fingers into her hair, but then stood abruptly, shoving the flimsy green plaid porch chair against the wooden wall of Bobbie's house. "Let's go inside, Bobbie." The screen porch door hawed open, then unevenly banged shut.

*SARAH COSTONIS (12)*

### SONNET TO THE STORM

My breath tears out in fitful, ragged rage,  
Wild-stirring like the branches in the wind.  
My thunderous heart is beating at its cage  
Like some crazed prisoner, fearing he has sinned.  
My eyes blink lightening, quicken, flash, and burn.  
Torrential thoughts pour down against my will;  
They fall to stomach-soul and seethe and churn—  
And black, electric, penetrating chill.  
But still a ragged bird sings in the storm  
Remorseless—to sing out on such a night,  
To call me from my slumber, safe and warm,  
To tempt me into song while sick with fright  
My soul lies trembling, huddled by the wall,  
Resisting this magnetic, troubled call...

*SARAH CHISOLM (12)*



## ENGLISH ASSIGNMENT No. 1

Mrs. Cravopple, my English teacher this year, said to write an essay using the informal style described in our Harbrace textbook. She said, "Write about something you know well. Try not to make things up. Use language you use in everyday speech, but make sure it's good grammar." Well, she didn't actually say it, but it's written on the assignment sheet. But she did tell us that we should write about something we know "as well as the proverbial back of your hand."

It's surprising how much I didn't know about the back of my hand. I have always taken it for granted. It's a hand, it's on my body, you know? I never really looked at it. She said that during class, just kind of threw it out at us, and I don't think she really looked at her hand either, or she wouldn't have said it so casually. She used an idiom, which she told us not to use. But we're all just bundles of contradictions, regular walking hypocrisies. My point is that I started looking at my hand, and all the things it does. Right now, both of them are typing even though I don't feel like I'm telling them to. They just sort of know where to press and how hard and everything without me having to think about it. And there you are, reading my thoughts, straight and uncensored from my head. Less disciplined hands would be typing all sorts of things; more disciplined hands would not have mentioned anything bad about Mrs. Cravopple. Perhaps I will delete that section before she reads it!

Then I got to thinking about my body. My mom says that the reason why I'm so clumsy is that I've grown so fast in my growth spurts. My legs and arms are inches longer than they were a year ago, so I'm not used to maneuvering them yet. I think she's right because just now at dinner when she handed a glass of milk to me, I knocked it right out of her hands when I reached for it. It's kind of funny. When my little brother spills milk when I babysit for him, he'll cry and look shocked, like the world has come to an end. I just clean it up instead of crying. But I still remember that feeling, it's like you've disturbed the natural order of the world, and the noise and white everywhere shocks you and makes you guilty. Well, the noise doesn't make you guilty, but . . . well, you know what I mean. You don't realize how easily you can fix it again. Well, but even now it's still embarrassing.

Actually, I don't think I felt embarrassed when I was a young kid. My baby brother will go into an elevator and talk to himself, or to anyone that will listen for that matter, or run around in circles at Target, or hop on one foot all the way down the sidewalk, and not notice that people might think strange things about him. But I guess they won't. Either they'll not notice his actions as strange, since he is just a little kid, or they'll smile and coo at how cute he is. I think I can remember the first time I was embarrassed, though. I must have been about four or five, and my parents threw this Mardi Gras party. I came downstairs to eat the party food before I went to bed. This one lady came up to the table too. I didn't know her, but she was fat. I must have known that you weren't supposed to be fat, so I felt bad for her, and so I said, "You are very pretty." I guess the whole room heard me, it was a small party, because then everyone started laughing. But I meant it to be serious! I ran back upstairs then, food in tow.



Now embarrassment is so much more insidious. It colors everything I do. Like, just the other day I finally realized that I shouldn't run, that girls in the eighth grade don't run to class, or to lunch, or to anywhere. So now I only run to class when no-one's looking. My brother never has anywhere important to run, but he runs all the time! The boys in our class run around when they play stupid basketball games that don't do anything. I mean, they run to one side of the court, and then run to the other. What's the point in that? I think that boys in general don't have to deal with embarrassment as much as girls. If a boy knocked over milk, he wouldn't care. But I feel clumsy and feel all weird. It's like I retreat back into my body, and I can see the black around where my eyes can't see much better. The more stupid I feel, the more reddish black I can see, and the more I feel like I'm sinking. The whole shell thing makes me feel more stupid even. Right now I'm even thinking about what the other people are going to think and say about this paper, and hoping it's not too idiotic, even though I know Mrs. Cravopple said she will not make us share our papers. (She means read them aloud in front of the class. Usually only the boys volunteer to do that.)

There's also the PE locker room. Almost everyone has a bra now. They look so foreign and forbidding with all those straps and contraptions and locks. You can tell whose mother went out and bought her kid a bra before school started because they take so long and look so confused when they have to take off or put on their bra before or after swimming. Last year there was a big division between the bra-wearers and the non's. My mom and her friend laughed when I asked her about shopping for a bra. The friend said: "Me and my twin sister were the last ones to get bras. We were always small, you know, short and skinny, since we were twins. But just a few years after that we were burning them in demonstrations and trying hard to get rid of them!" I just found out about bra-burning from that Billy Joel video, "We Didn't Start the Fire." That video makes me cry. Finally Patty, my mom's friend, took me. Mom couldn't as she was too busy working on her dissertation. Or her doctorate. I'm not sure which it is she's working on. Maybe both. But I love Patty, she's like an aunt. She made me feel less humiliated when the saleslady came up and pestered me with dumb questions, like: "Is this your first bra? Are you small-chested? Oh, we have pretty ones in pink or with cartoon characters that our . . . our younger customers love!" I don't want Garfield on my new breasts!

And poor Tabitha Trent, who got her period first in our class and who last year bled on her desk. She's so quiet and shy anyway, it liked to kill her of embarrassment, especially when the boys started teasing her. Then the girls kind of shunned her. They didn't mean to. I did too. It was this mixture of disgust, awe and envy, and I couldn't really look at her that whole year without remembering that day. Math class, with Mr. Moosow of all people. When she got up to leave as the bell rang, he called her back and said, "Ms. Trent, did you cut your leg? Are you OK?" I have never seen anyone's face turn quite that color before. And all the while, his flabby fingers (he always points with his first two fingers) were pointing straight at the telltale desk, wavering a little bit because he's so old. I mean, how can you look someone in the eye when all you're thinking of is that horrible moment? Poor Tabitha.

She has the biggest breasts in the eighth grade, and used to always wear baggy sweaters to hide them. Me, I'd rather be above the average than



have the dinky ones that I do. Patty calls them "pert." Sarah Tennston has the smallest breasts *and* she's in the popular crowd, so girls are always making jokes at her expense in front of guys, to look better or something. I just think they look mean, but I guess guys don't know the difference. For some reason, everyone knows that she wears a training bra. How does stuff like that get out, and why does it matter anyways?

Miriam paused to shoo her little brother away from the cookies she was eating. After she successfully cleared him from the study, she looked back at her paper and flinched away immediately. Miriam couldn't even look at all the junk she had typed. This was the very first English assignment of Eighth Grade! She didn't want her teacher to know all this stuff. Plus, what if Mrs. Cravopple hated it and read it in front of the class as an example of bad writing in her nasal, emotionless voice? Or what if she loved it and made her read it in front of the class? No way, she thought, taking a cookie and slowly pulling it apart with her fingers.

Her mom always got mad at Miriam for doing that, and Miriam could never quite explain how much she wanted to see the chocolate chips stick to the opposite half and be all melty like on commercials. It never happened with these Kroger cookies, though. Miriam just knew that if her mom would make cookies and take them out of the oven, then the chips would drip and pull and string to each other like pizza cheese. Miriam had tried making cookies herself before, of course, but her mom never had the stuff like vanilla or the chocolate chips and especially not the time to go grocery shopping. Once Patty had brought over the ingredients and together they had tried, but Patty had begun talking to Mrs. Wimberly and the cookies burned. Only if her mom baked the cookies, and only if her mom used Crisco, would the cookies work their cookie magic. So Miriam usually ended up pulling the cookies to shreds, and then feeding the starchy sweet split ends to her little brother.

Maybe she could write her paper on cookies, she thought, struck by the brilliance of her plan. Then she looked at the two pages she had already typed. Maybe it would probably be better if she just edited what she already had. So Miriam grasped the computer's gray mouse, and began to edit.

#### What I Know Well

It's surprising how much I didn't know about the back of my hand. I have always taken it for granted. I never really looked at it, but now I am looking at my hand, and all the things it does. Both of them are typing even though I don't feel like I'm telling them to.

Then I got to thinking about the rest of me. I'm sort of clumsy; for instance, at dinner just now I knocked a glass of milk right out of my mother's hands when I reached for it. It's kind of funny: when my little brother spills milk when I babysit for him, he'll cry and look shocked, like the world has come to an end. I clean it up instead of crying. But I still remember that feeling, it's like you've disturbed the natural order of the world, and the noise and white everywhere shocks you. You don't realize how easily you can fix it again. But then, even now it's still embarrassing. Actually, I don't think I felt exactly embarrassed when I was a young kid, it was more like shock than embarrassment.

When I get embarrassed, I feel clumsy and feel all weird. It's like I retreat



back into my body, and I can see much better the black around where my eyes can't see. The more stupid I feel, the more reddish black I can see, and the more I feel like I'm sinking. The whole shell thing makes me feel more stupid even. Anything you say once you've entered that shell sounds dumb.

I feel like I know the feeling of embarrassment almost better than I know my body. A body is so big and has so many things on it, like noses and birthmarks, that you could never really know it. But embarrassment is a familiar place to me. Is that normal?

Miriam quickly erased that question, and then went back to erase all the "I feel" sentences. For some reason, that seemed too personal. And she really couldn't tell the class too much about what she felt. People would think she was strange if every other sentence began with "I feel." Then she added a weak conclusion and spellchecked it. The word count said it was 329 words; it was supposed to be about 350 to 500. Good enough. Miriam printed it and left the computer room behind.

[and now . . . a second glance at our heroine]

"No, Patty! It won't work, OK?" (Stop stop stop stop please don't —)

"Look, Miriam, the reason those cookies are melty is because they're warm. See?" and Patty firmly planted the Kroger flat cookies on a plate. "Just stick 'em in the microwave for 20 seconds. That's what I do sometimes." Beep. Beep-beep-beep beep; each frenzied Miriam even more and drove her higher in frustration, plying into her ears and rattling 'round in her skull.

"Look, please it doesn't matter, OK? I know you don't like waste, but I barely waste anything. Only cookies, and Josh eats those anyways. OK? So don't worry about it." (Miriam, Miriam, don't let your voice go so shrill. Don't bother Patty. Don't make her worry about you. Stop acting desperate. Calm!)

"Oh, it's OK Miriam. I know how much you want to see it. There, all done." Deftly, Patty opened the black microwave door and handed Miriam the warm-cold-warm patterned plate (how does she move everything so fast? can I get out of touching that plate but I've already taken it —). Miriam gingerly picked up a cookie (it's OK, it is soggy and will fall apart, right), but it failed to fail her. She grasped it and pulled at it, and slowly watched as black helplessly oozed down and strung itself to the wooden floor to be camouflaged there.

"Miriam, you need to watch that!" Patty's voice was unnecessarily sharp.

"Sorry, Patty. I'll clean it up." So now she had nothing to ask her mother for. No claims were due from Mrs Wimberly, but no complaints against her could be made either.

"Well, I'm gonna go downstairs to check on your mom, hon. That woman is working herself straight into her grave." Patty slipped down the stairs, escaping gratefully from Miriam's face. Hadn't that been what Miriam wanted?

"It's just that, well, I mean, it's OK." Miriam's fingers didn't look like they were adult fingers, but they knew how to clean melted chocolate off the floor. "I mean, I'll be OK, because my hands know how to do things, and all. And I'm in the Eighth Grade, I should be able to take care of myself anyways. And I can. So it doesn't matter. Really, it doesn't."

SARAH COSTONIS (12)



## "THE JUICE"; OR, "WHY I READ."

As I lay lifelessly in my bed with a box of tissues in one hand and the remote in the other, I came to a horrible thought which made the soup I just ate churn unhappily in my stomach: even if I wanted to I could not escape the O.J. Simpson trial, no matter how hard I tried. Four of my forty cable channels were showing nothing but Judge Ito screaming at the defense because of another incident. One channel was discussing the prosecution's last movement. Two more channels were discussing Marsha Clark's new hair style, another channel was discussing the old one. A friend of a friend of a friend's housekeeper was on Geraldo claiming that O.J. never would leave his socks on the floor like that, and Geraldo was about to uncover what was in that envelope when I changed the channel.

Oh, Lord, eleven channels down and I've got twenty-nine left to go. Well actually I had twenty-two left if you're not counting the two C-spans, C-NBC, two home shopping networks, one cable access, and the station with the strange scramble over the picture, and I'm not. With my head stuffed and my body aching, all I yearned for was a quiet t.v. show to lull me off to sleep. What could I try that I know would be safe? "Next on Biography: the Juice!" No! Not A&E. Will the horror, will this trial ever end? That was not going to happen, according to two more channels which both predicted that there will be a hung jury. ESPN was airing a thrilling expose on how football players go bad. Comedy Central! Take me away! No, not Kato! I felt my temperature rise. A fever raged through my body, and I didn't have the energy to get up to turn off the t.v.

The final straw knocked me down harder than any cold ever could. Out of more than ten average people interviewed on the street, nine recognized Simpson's defense team by name but only two could recognize Al Gore, and only one could name him.

As I drifted off to sleep, I decided that I was going to read more.

MARY MICHAEL JOHNSON (11)



## ROSES ON TUESDAY

Dozens of roses arrived on Tuesday  
The card attached to them read see you soon  
Roses on Tuesday...well, that was his way  
A candlelight dinner, a shimmery moon.

Later that night as we strolled through the park  
He turned to me, kissing my hand and said  
Please marry me, don't leave me in the dark  
So he and I were engaged to be wed.

It took lots of days and many long nights  
The priest, the florist, the coordinator too  
The day soon came with cold feet and pure fright  
Something old, and new, and borrowed, and blue.

I walked down the aisle with dad at my side  
He never showed up, the S.O.B. had lied!

*SARAH NANNEY (11)*

## SNATCH AWAY THE SKY AND THE NIGHT

Snatch away the sky and the night  
to place in your silver pocket

Breathe as my world who holds  
the eyes balanced on toppling crests  
view the ways of silken silence  
which lend themselves to pave a  
walk to my spirit

The animal slips on padded banks  
crawling within the humbled doors  
unleash the sails, the jungle roam

Yet none lie in wait for thee  
Anger and hope have together wandered fulfilling  
the surrounding space. In their beds  
a hollow mountain empty of the winds  
while Aeolus has fled his home

Thus find naught to resurrect  
but desert that which is already lost, savior mine

*DEVON WILLIAMSON (10)*



## ALMOST PERFECTION

There is one time in particular that I remember thinking to myself, "I will always remember this." I went to bed early that night, exhausted by a long and trying day, and just as I had begun to drift off to sleep, the phone rang. Who was on the phone and what they said is not of importance now. The only thing that you need to know is that phone call crushed all of my dreams and hopes. My mentors and friends had lied and deceived me. My value system, all that I had been taught, was shaken to the very roots. There was no one left to trust and nothing left to believe in. I stood and watched as my world crumbled around me. I felt utterly alone. My parents were yelling, one trying to place blame on the other. They were more upset at the situation than they were at each other. I thought if I stayed in the house I would explode. I needed fresh air. I went down to the basement and found the door flung open and outside lights turned on. I stepped outside into the warm summer rain. The stars were covered by thick clouds. The moon was the only light in the entire sky. I turned to go back inside when I caught a glimpse of something moving. As I stood straining to see through the darkness, my brother appeared. He came marching through the dark and into the light like some sort of supernatural being, a ghost. He looked like a lost soul caught halfway between life and death. He said nothing but advanced in long brisk strides to where I stood. He put his arms around me. We stood silently in the rain. He hugged me and I cried. Neither one of us said a word; everything was understood. For that instant, everything was understood. For that instant, everything was okay. It didn't matter that everything I'd believed had disappeared.

For the first time I realized that I would never be alone. My hell was his. We are of the same mind; we feel the same things, and we understand each other completely. We are able to communicate almost telepathically. There would always be this one person I could count on. He is more than my brother, and more than my twin; he is my support, my strength, and my courage. I put all my trust in him, for I know that he would never betray me. Standing in the rain, sopping wet, I understood this. There is but one person for whom I would walk through the hottest fires of hell; his room is just at the other end of the hall. He is my living angel.

BETH KAUTZMAN (11)



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